

JULY 25, 1974

Many companies are insisting that their executives wear casual clothes to the office to allow for a reduction in air conditioning. Short sleeve shirts don't require the thermostat to be as low as grey flannel suits and flowered neckties do. Hombres wearing collars loose at the throatlatch are much easier to cool. It is a sensible policy.

In the Shortgrass Country, herders have followed that dress code for years. Burying suits and choke-down neckwear have been worn as sparingly as the mother Shortgrasser would tolerate.

Hats and boots have been the most important part of our costumes. (I realize you know all that, but I always hope that strangers will find a copy of this newspaper in a dentist's office or on a table in a footdoctor's waiting room, and need more information.)

Hombres out here who unfold in several directions around the middle are very discerning about their panama toppers and toe pieces on their boots. Great plains are taken in selecting a straw hat and the ostrich hide to go on a heel piece; little attention is paid to summer coats or strangulation neckties.

Until recently, I followed the same fashion as my colleagues. However, after an experience I'm going to relate, I may go for tractor caps and motorcycle boots.

The first incident occurred after I'd bought a new straw hat, and before I'd learned new straw hats are a big western fakes as the imitation silk handkerchiefs that movie cowboys used to wear.

I was passing through a strange town, looking for directions to a ranch. It was just about time for city folks to be quitting work when I spotted two old boys talking across a yard fence.

The town wasn't large enough to harbor the enemies of mane who roam the cities, so I figured it'd be possible to gain directions without insulting the dignity of these two hombres. I wouldn't anymore ask a city fellow the name of a street than I would ask a politician's wife where she bought her jewelry, but I didn't connect this village to a big town.

I'd barely dismounted from the pickup until I understood what was going on. The old man on the inside of the fellow on the street side to "get on, Bud. I'm not interested in any insurance." In the same breath, he turned toward me and said, "and I don't want any damn cantaloupes, either."

As I remember, I said something like I'm sorry you don't like cantaloupes and you can take your evil temper and go stick it in a mud-hole. I was pretty upset over being mistaken for a fruit peddler. I kind of have to make up what I told the old man.

Later on in the same evening, I was standing in a place that had a big mirror facing the customers. (Don't second guess what kind of place it was. You aren't my wife. I don't have to explain everywhere I go.) I still had on my new hat. I was still smarting a bit around my tolerance glands about the old man's remark. The hat was looking pretty good in that kind of setting.

The fellow standing next to me was one of those hombres who could play the lead part in "Pop Goes the Weasel" without any makeup. You know the kind I mean - those hombres whose growth is stunted from talking too much.

Without any introduction, or preliminary opening, he ups and says, "I'll bet the sweet potater bugs is about to eat you fellers up after this last rain."

Had it not been for the reflection in the mirror, I would have begged this squashead's pardon and informed him that the verb "its" fits singular subjects only. But, glancing at the mirror, I could see that my new hat would have made John Wayne's best topper look like he'd been bucked off a stagecoach head first.

So I'm going to start dressing like I was trying to save on air-conditioning and straw, too. I never did have a good looking hat, anyhow. Weasel heads and grouchy old men ought to learn to identify their fellow man. I can't even grow bermuda grass, much less cantaloupes and sweep potatoes.